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FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO

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SIPDIS

FOR EAP/RSP: JANDRE AND EAP/J

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/03/2018

TAGS: ECIN PREL ASEAN JA

SUBJECT: ASEAN SUMMITS: MOFA WAITING FOR DIRECTION FROM PM

REF: STATE 123211

Classified By: Ambassador J. Thomas Schieffer. Reason 1.4(b)

¶1. (C) Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) officials responsible for ASEAN affairs have resisted repeated Embassy requests to discuss the upcoming ASEAN summit, citing lack of time. Nevertheless, a working-level official in MOFA's Asian Regional Policy Division, which is responsible for the summit preparations, told Econoff December 2 MOFA is waiting for policy direction from the Prime Minister's office on what the GOJ hopes to accomplish at Chiang Mai. Current policy is "not yet explicit", he said, and will require further "internal discussion and coordination."

¶2. (C) The staffer added the GOJ considers it "highly likely" the Chiang Mai meetings will be postponed due to the Thailand's ongoing political turmoil and airport closure. (Note: In fact, the ASEAN Secretary General announced a postponement later that day.) MOFA expects it will be several months, not weeks, before the meetings can be rescheduled. By that time, GOJ objectives for the meeting could change significantly, he noted. He promised to follow up with the Embassy once the situation in Bangkok clarified.

¶3. (SBU) In the meantime, the centerpiece of Japan's economic relationship with the region remains the ASEAN-Japan Comprehensive Partnership Agreement (CEPA) which came into effect December 2. As of now, only four ASEAN members --Singapore, Vietnam, Laos and Burma -- have ratified the agreement, but a METI Economic Partnership Division official is confident the remaining members, with the possible exception of Thailand, will complete ratification procedures by the end of the year. Japan's Diet approved the pact in June 2008. Japan's main objective for CEPA is to complement, not replace, existing economic partnership agreements with ASEAN's five leading economies and to apply a single rules-of-origin regime to all products produced by Japanese-owned factories anywhere in the region.

SCHIEFFER